AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. (Currently Amended) A fastener comprising:

a base;

a center post extending from the base;

at least two arcuate hinge segments extending divergently from a distal end of the center post and away from the base, each hinge segment having two arcuate surfaces both of which are spaced apart from the distal end of the center post and both of which are concave with respect to the base; and

at least two wings extending divergently away from a region near the distal end of the center post and towards the base, distal ends of the arcuate hinge segments joining the wings, respectively.

2. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein each arcuate hinge segment joins a corresponding wing at an interior location relative to ends of the wing.

3. (Original) The fastener of claim 2, wherein:

a portion of each wing that extends in a first direction towards the base is a first portion;

each wing includes a second portion extending in a second direction generally opposite the first direction;

distal ends of the second portions being arranged adjacent each other in a region beyond the distal end of the center post, the region being centered on an imaginary line substantially collinear with a long axis of the center post.

4. (Original) The fastener of claim 3, wherein the first and second portions of the two wings are arranged in a beak-configuration.

5. (Original) The fastener of claim 3, wherein the two ends of the second portions of the wings have a ball-and-socket type of conformation, respectively.

6. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein:

a portion of each wing that extends towards the base includes a first part and a second part;

a proximal end of each second portion joining the distal end of the respective arcuate hinge segment;

each first portion sloping away from the center post;

proximal ends of the second portions joining distal ends of the first portions, respectively; and

each of the second portions extending toward the base and sloping toward an imaginary line substantially collinear with a long axis of the center post.

7. (Original) The fastener of claim 6, wherein each first part is a curved member.

8. (Original) The fastener of claim 7, wherein a radius of curvature of the curved member is about 28 mm.

9. (Original) The fastener of claim 6, wherein an outside surface of the first part bears against an edge defining a hole in a panel when the fastener is partially inserted into the hole.

10. (Original) The fastener of claim 6, wherein an outside surface of the second part bears against an edge defining a hole in a panel when the fastener is fully inserted into the hole.

11. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, further comprising:

two bridges joining the center post near the distal end thereof and extending from wing-ends distal relative to where the arcuate hinge segments join the wings, respectively.

12. (Currently Amended) The ~~method~~ fastener of claim 11, wherein an arrangement of the center post relative to each bridge forms an angle of about 13.5°.

13. (Original) The fastener of claim 11, wherein each bridge segment represents a substantially straight member.

14. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein at least one of the arcuate hinge segments and the wings is resilient.

15. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the divergent arrangement of the two arcuate hinge segments with respect to the center post has an inverted Y-shaped conformation.

16. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein:

the base is part of a head;

the head is arranged to have a concave umbrella surface; and

the umbrella surface is disposed such that the wings partially extend into a void defined by the umbrella surface.

17. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein each arcuate hinge segment includes two opposing surfaces that are concentric.

18. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the fastener is a single unitary part formed of a polymer.

19. (Original) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the polymer is polyoxymethylene.

20. (Original) A fastener comprising:

a shaft;

two members each having a silhouette analogous to a head of a claw-hammer, each member including a neck-analogous portion, a claw-analogous portion and a striking-face-analogous portion, at least one of the portions being resilient;

an end of each neck-analogous portion joining the same end of the shaft; and

two bridges joining ends of the striking-face-analogous portions to the shaft.

21. (Original) The fastener of claim 20, wherein the claw-analogous portions together resemble pincers.

22. (Original) The fastener of claim 21, wherein the distal ends of the claw-analogous portions have a ball-and-socket type of conformation, respectively.

23. (Original) The fastener of claim 20, wherein, for each member, at least one of the neck-analogous portion, the claw-analogous portion and the striking-face-analogous portion is resilient.

24. (Original) The fastener of claim 20, wherein each neck-analogous portion is arcuate.

25. (Original) The fastener of claim 21, where the fastener is a single unitary part formed of a polymer.

26. (Original) A fastener comprising:

a base;

a stalk extending substantially perpendicularly from the base;

members extending divergently from an end of the stalk distal to the base, each member having a substantially T-shaped configuration that includes arms and an arcuate trunk, proximal ends of the arms joining the trunk,

a first one of the member-arms extending towards the base, and

a second one of the member-arms extending towards a region beyond the distal end of the stalk; and

bridges joining distal ends of the first member-arms to areas on the stalk near the distal end thereof.

27. (Original) The fastener of claim 26, wherein;

the arrangements of the first member-arms and the trunk are resilient, respectively; and

the bridges restrain deflection of the distal ends of the first member-arms away from the stalk.

28. (Original) The fastener of claim 26, wherein;

the arrangements of the second member-arms and the trunk are resilient, respectively; and

collision of the distal ends of the second member-arms restrains convergent deflection of the second wing-arms.

29. (Original) The fastener of claim 26, wherein the distal ends of the second member-arms are arranged in a beak-configuration.

30. (Original) The fastener of claim 26, wherein the distal ends of the second members-arms have a ball-and-socket type of conformation, respectively.

31. (Original) A polymeric fastener comprising:

an elongated first member;

a deflectable second member coupled to and diagonally extending from the first member;

at least a deflectable third member coupled to and diagonally extending from the first member, the second and third members being spaced from each other;

a tip area including a rounded section and an concave section, the rounded section and the concave section being spaced from each other if the fastener is in an unfastened state, the rounded section contacting against the concave section if the fastener is in a state wherein fastener retraction force is greater than fastener insertion force.

32. (Original) The polymeric fastener of claim 31, wherein:

the couplings of the second and third members to the first member represent first-type connections therebetween, respectively; and

the polymeric fastener further comprises

first and second suspension links operable to restrain deflection of the second and third members via the making of second-type connections between the first member and the second and third members, respectively.

33. (Original) The polymeric fastener of claim 32, wherein locations of the first-type connections are substantially adjacent to locations of the second-type connections, respectively.

34. (Currently Amended) A fastening system comprising:

an automotive vehicle panel having a hole;

a polymeric fastener, insertable into the hole, including

an arrangement compressible against a first side of the panel,

a pillar extending from the arrangement through the hole and away from a second side of the panel opposite the first side, an end of the pillar distal to the arrangement at least bifurcating, and

a first and at least a second deflectable member coupled at respective middle portions thereof to and diagonally extending from the at-least-bifurcated end of the pillar,

each branch of the at-least-bifurcated end and a corresponding one of the first and second members taking a T-shaped configuration,

corresponding beak portions of the first and second members convergently extending towards each other with respective distal ends thereof being adjacent such that the first and second members together have a silhouette resembling a beak, and

a first and at least second bridging member joining the pillar to distal ends of wing portions of the first and at least second deflectable member, respectively.

35. (Currently Amended) A method of using a fastener having wings coupled at respective middle portions thereof via first-type connections to and deflectable about a bifurcated end of a shaft, there being corresponding portions of the first and second members resembling pincers, there also being diagonal members representing second-type connections between the shaft and the wings, respectively,

the method comprising:

the fastener exhibiting a threshold first amount of force necessary to fully insert the fastener into a hole in a panel; ~~and~~

the fastener exhibiting a threshold second amount of force greater than the first amount necessary to withdraw the fully-inserted fastener from the hole; and the fastener exhibiting a threshold third amount of force necessary for an attempt at withdrawing the fastener to begin deflection of the wings from a position thereof taken while the fastener is fully inserted in the hole,

the third amount being greater than the first amount but less than the second amount; and

the fastener exhibiting, upon deflection of the wings sufficient that the pincers collide, the threshold second amount of force.

36. (Cancelled)

37. (New) A fastener comprising:

a base;

a center post extending from the base;

at least two arcuate hinge segments extending divergently from a distal end of the center post and away from the base, each hinge segment having two arcuate surfaces both of which are spaced apart from the distal end of the center post and both of which are concave with respect to the base;

at least two wings extending divergently away from a region near the distal end of the center post and towards the base, distal ends of the arcuate hinge segments joining the wings, respectively; and

two substantially straight bridges joining the center post near the distal end thereof and extending from wing-ends distal relative to where the arcuate hinge segments join the wings, respectively;

wherein a portion of each wing that extends in a first direction towards the base is a first portion;

wherein each wing includes a second portion extending in a second direction generally opposite the first direction;

wherein distal ends of the second portions are arranged adjacent each other in a region beyond the distal end of the center post, the region being centered on an imaginary line substantially collinear with a long axis of the center post;

wherein the two ends of the second portions of the wings have a ball-and-socket type of conformation, respectively; and also

wherein the fastener exhibits a threshold first amount of force necessary to fully insert the fastener into a hole in a panel;

wherein the fastener exhibits a threshold second amount of force greater than the first amount necessary to withdraw the fully-inserted fastener from the hole; and

wherein the fastener exhibits a threshold third amount of force necessary for an attempt at withdrawing the fastener to begin deflection of the wings from a position thereof taken while the fastener is fully inserted in the hole;

wherein the third amount is greater than the first amount but less than the second amount; and

wherein the fastener exhibits, upon deflection of the wings sufficient that the second portions of the ball-and-socket type of conformation collide, the threshold second amount of force.

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